

Snapshots

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



February 13, 2004

California

Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council Community Assistance Grants Help Save Homes in Southern California

The 2003 firestorm in southern California will be remembered for its victims, heroes, destruction and strife. Also remembered are the lessons about empowerment and collaboration, where preparation and planning played an important role in protection from wildfire. Such is the case of the Lytle Creek Fire Council.

In two out of the three years since its inception, the Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council has received funding through the Bureau of Land Management's Community Assistance Program. These grants help empower local non-profit groups with guidance and resources to reduce wildfire threats in their community. Projects emphasize hazardous fuel reduction, fire protection planning, community risk assessments, and community fire prevention education.



Chuck Hewitson and Ryne Hoeppner, members of the Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council, work with neighbors to remove hazardous fuels.

With BLM funding, Lytle Creek's Fire Safe Council was able to work with residents in a community of about 1,000 people in an area approximately eight-miles long to create defensible space around 95 percent of the homes. The fire safe council defensible space project, in combination with U.S. Forest Service fuel breaks along national forest lands adjacent to the community, was their saving grace during the 2003 firestorm.

As the fires fed on upon the hills during the warm and windy days of October,

Lytle Creek evacuations progressed until firefighters were pulling out of town. Jack Kennedy, a fire battalion chief, who'd worked with the council, spoke to the fire incident commander about holding firefighters in place. The community had done their job in creating defensible space and

now the firefighters would use that space to defend it.

"At one point, this community had been completely surrounded by wildfire" recalled Ellen Pollema, Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council president. But, with the heroic efforts of firefighters, and the planning and preparations done by the council membership, only 18 of 350 homes were lost to the fire.

Similar success stories throughout California are being collected by the California Fire Safe Council, demonstrating the importance of community-level collaborations in creating a fire safe environment.



The fire safe council worked with a disabled homeowner to remove branches away from her house and garage just weeks before the fire. Homes across the street were lost, but hers was saved.



The 2003 fire came all the way up to the defensible space created behind these homes. None were burned.

For more information about the California Fire Safe Council contact Bruce Turbeville, Chairman, at (916) 762-2757. Questions related to the Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council can be directed to Ellen Pollema at (909) 466-7388.

BLM contact: Miriam H. Morrill, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, California State Office (916) 978-4436

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Hazardous Fuels Project Brings Rural Community Together for Fire Prevention Week

In October 2003, the Bureau of Land Management Bishop Field Office led an interagency group of firefighters, volunteers, and homeowners in a project to reduce hazardous fuels across a square mile of private property adjacent to BLM land.

This hazardous fuels project helped protect the communities of Chalfant, West Chalfant, and White Mountain Estates and



Bishop BLM fire personnel and Inyo National Forest Crew 3 hard at work feeding a chipper during the Chalfant Hazardous Fuels Removal Project.

brought them together in support of Fire Prevention Week. By overcoming attitude barriers BLM was able to help create defensible space around houses and educate the community about fire safety behaviors such as installing smoke detectors and developing escape plans.

With interagency collaboration, and public support, this project went off without a hitch. After project completion, a community party was thrown in celebration of Fire Prevention Week efforts which started in 2002 to help educate Californians about the dangers of

fire around the home and how to prevent them. BLM works to find new and innovative ways each year to engage local communities in collaborative projects for wildfire safety and preparedness.

Contact: Robert Bertolina, BLM Bishop Field Office (760) 647-3028

Rural Fire Assistance Program Rates High in California

The heart of fire protection in many California communities is the rural and volunteer fire department. These local stations are staffed by neighbors, friends and family members who care about the safety and welfare of their community. They are often understaffed, under funded and lacking training and fire equipment.

With an ever increasing wildland urban interface, bug killed forests, and altered fire regimes, California firefighters need up-to-date training and equipment to be safe and effective in these extreme wildfire conditions. The critical need for rural departments is to be self-sufficient in order to lead their communities in wildfire preparedness.

Many grassroots efforts in fire safety and preparedness receive much needed funding through the National Fire Plan. An important component of the National Fire Plan is Rural Fire Assistance, which offers partnerships and funding toward improving rural fire department safety and fire fighting capabilities.



Rural fire departments provide critical public safety response to local communities. Here, a firefighter uses the "jaws of life" at an automobile accident.

The Bureau of Land Management's Rural Fire Assistance program in California has been expanding to meet the growing needs of local communities. In 2001, BLM



Henri and Darren from the Butte County Fire Rescue, one of the 2004 RFA grant recipients, pose with new firefighting and rescue equipment.

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provided funding to 16 rural fire departments. In 2002, it reached 25, and by 2003 expanded to include 83 departments across the state. These cumulative efforts have improved fire fighting capabilities in well over 100 communities across the state.

Rural fire departments and local fire safe councils continue to sing the praises of BLM's Community and Rural Fire Assistance Programs. Communities are growing stronger and becoming more self-sufficient in their Firewise activities and the BLM continues to support and collaborate in their efforts.

Contact: Miriam Morrill, BLM California State Office, (916) 978-4436